

2024-
2025

University of California,
Merced

Public Health Graduate
Student Handbook

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
in Public Health



Table of Contents

1. Preface.....	2
2. Vision.....	3
3. Introduction of the Program.....	4
4. Academic Advising Structure and Mentorship.....	6
5. Sources of Funding	7
6. Coursework Requirements.....	8
7. Department Community Participation Expectations	10
8. Optional Second Year Research Paper	11
9. Teaching Requirements	12
10. Normative Time to Degree and Plan of Study.....	13
11. Annual Review Process	14
12. Qualifying Examinations and Advancement to Candidacy	16
13. Dissertation	19
14. Policies Regarding Transfer Students.....	21
15. Procedures for Requesting a Waiver of a Formal Requirement	22
16. Leaving the Program Prior to Completion of the PhD Requirements	22
17. PELP, In Absentia and Filing Fee status	22
20. Appendix A: Rubrics	xxiii
21. Appendix B: Faculty mentor/student mentee compact.....	xxxii

1. Preface

Welcome to graduate school! You are about to begin one of the most exciting, rewarding, and demanding phases of your adult life. Pursuing a PhD is a privilege! Between now and graduation, you will develop from an enthusiastic and ambitious student into a professional scientist with highly specialized technical and substantive knowledge, a professional who is capable of functioning independently as a researcher, teacher, and colleague. Few other times in your life offer you the opportunities you will encounter in the next several years. Take advantage of them. Remember, you are preparing for a successful career in a competitive job market, not merely to obtain a degree. You will want to leave here as well-prepared as you can be.

This Public Health Graduate Student Handbook is a manual to help you successfully navigate the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Public Health program at UC Merced. It contains a variety of information, ranging from milestone requirements (e.g., qualifying exam, dissertation) to expected coursework to training as a researcher. Read the Handbook to get an overview of what will happen throughout the next several years and *refer to it regularly* as you encounter questions about what you need to do. Develop questions for your advisor and regularly discuss with them how, within this structure, you can reach your goals with excellence. Ask your fellow graduate students about their experiences. They can provide useful guidance on getting through the program. You can also use the Handbook to help you keep track of your own progress against the milestones and expected timelines for completion of your doctoral degree. By the time you graduate, your copy of the Handbook should be well-worn and annotated.

All graduate students are expected to be familiar with the contents of (a) the Public Health Student Handbook, (b) the Public Health PhD Policies & Procedures document, and (c) all Graduate Division Policies and Procedures. The most recent Graduate Division Policies & Procedures document, on the Graduate Division's website, which contains additional key information about graduate policies and procedures at UC Merced, is here: <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>. You are expected to adhere to the expectations detailed in the Student Handbook and Policies & Procedures versions provided to you when you entered the program, unless you elect to adopt a version that is more recent.

2. Vision

Public Health at UC Merced is a vibrant and collegial intellectual community, marked by outstanding scholarship and participation in interdisciplinary communities of inquiry. Our goal is to foster scholarly excellence in Public Health, with a specific focus on three topical areas: prevention sciences, environmental health, and health services. The Public Health Program provides members of underrepresented groups access to first class under- and graduate-level training and contributes new knowledge to efforts to address health and healthcare disparities in the region.

3. Introduction of the Program

Doctoral study in Public Health is focused on acquiring the conceptual and methodological skills necessary to operate as an independent researcher. At UC Merced, this is accomplished through a mentorship model in which students work closely with a supervising Faculty Advisor who has primary responsibility for overseeing that student's training. At the same time, students may broaden their research training through involvement in research programs conducted by another faculty. There are numerous specific degree requirements, explained in detail throughout this document (e.g., passing the Qualifying Exam). It is also expected that graduate students will contribute to and generate additional research, adding to the intellectual and organizational life of the department.

The Doctor of Philosophy degree is not granted by the University of California merely for the fulfillment of technical requirements. Rather, the recipient of a PhD degree is understood to possess thorough knowledge of a broad field of learning, have demonstrated evidence of distinguished accomplishment in that field, and evidence critical ability and powers of imaginative synthesis. The degree also signifies that the recipient has presented a doctoral dissertation containing an original contribution to knowledge in their chosen field of study.

Although the Public Health Graduate Program is designed for students interested in pursuing a PhD in Public Health, PhD students (typically those who matriculate without a master's degree) have the option to obtain a *Master of Science in Public Health* (M.S.P.H.) degree, either en route to a PhD degree or in lieu of a PhD degree if a student exits the graduate program prior to fulfilling the PhD requirements.

Graduate work is highly demanding. Graduate students quickly come to learn that far more is expected of them now than when they were undergraduates. You will likely be more successful if you adjust your expectations for your own performance from the start. Below are some examples.

- **Coursework.** Coursework provides a foundation for core areas of your learning, an opportunity to become familiar with research literature, and a forum for creatively exploring your own research ideas. Your investment and success in classroom learning is critical to your success as a graduate student. You will read much more than you are probably used to for some courses, and in other courses you will work on several larger assignments that will require consistent, high-quality work over several weeks.
- **Research.** Unlike many undergraduates who simply strive to "get the requirements done," as a graduate student you are expected to become an expert in your chosen field, to know your literature deeply, to be able to use the methods in your field independently, and to establish your research vita with publications, conference presentations, and grants. It is not enough to meet the milestone research requirements; you need to accomplish considerably more than that. Devoting as much time as possible to your research is essential to a successful graduate career.
- **Service.** Service opportunities, such as organizing talks or serving on committees, provide the chance to more fully engage in our academic community. You will be expected to be involved in some aspect of service, but generally not until you are a few years into the program. The amount of time this will take varies by task, but you should put in the time needed to achieve commendable results in your service work.

- **Assistantships.** Teaching and research assistantships (ASE/TA and GSR appointments) are employment positions that provide graduate students with income and cover their UC Merced tuition and fees. During the academic year, these positions are offered on a semester basis and are typically appointed at 50.0% time (20 hours per week). Note that these hours are on top of regular coursework and research commitments. Graduate student employees are represented by a union (UAW 2865), which negotiates with the University of California system to determine pay, benefits, and policies regarding TA and GSR appointments. You can read more about these appointments in the Graduate Division Policies & Procedures. The Public Health Graduate Group works with Graduate Services to assign PhD students to TA positions, but does not otherwise oversee them in this capacity.

You should also plan to work most of the semester breaks (while also taking some time for rest and relaxation!). This is prime time to spend on your research development. Talk to your advisor or other faculty members about how much they worked as graduate students.

The first year of graduate school, especially the first semester, is often the most difficult for many graduate students. The adjustment demands are steep. You will take more courses than at any other time in graduate school, and some of them like statistics and research methods are difficult for many students. You are learning new skills in teaching and research that you may not have much prior experience with. Be patient and work hard. Support each other. By your third year, you will take far fewer courses, and by your fourth year you will generally not take any courses at all. If you want a sense of your likely course load, look at the sample program listed in this Handbook. The following are other recommendations to increase your likelihood of success throughout graduate school:

- **Understand and adhere to the programmatic milestones.** You are expected to move through your graduate training on schedule (e.g., taking your Qualifying Exam in December of your third year). Part of being a professional is being able to meet the many demands of professional life. More pointedly, *TA appointments will not be provided by the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA) to students past their fifth year*; thus, unless you are able to find a GSR position or fellowship to fund a sixth year, you will run out of funding after your fifth year. Failure to adhere to programmatic milestones on the timeline outlined will put you at risk for an Unsatisfactory Performance evaluation (which itself has implications for funding availability).
- **Take required coursework on the expected timeline.** If an undergraduate did not think they would do well in a course, they could just drop it. As a graduate student, dropping a course is strongly discouraged and rarely permitted. The courses that graduate students take are the ones the faculty has judged are essential for you to develop as a professional. If a graduate student has to drop a course, it calls into question whether the student can master the needed professional skills. Failure to complete required coursework with at least a B average is grounds for a potential Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation. Of course, there will always be exceptions to this, especially under extraordinary circumstances. If that is happening to you, go talk to your advisor, your course instructor, and/or the Graduate Group Chair. They will likely be able to help you.

4. Academic Advising Structure and Mentorship

4a. Faculty Advisor and Mentorship Compact

A graduate student is expected to have a Faculty Advisor at all times during their graduate studies, and is usually admitted to the Public Health graduate program with the intent of being mentored by a named Faculty Advisor. At the same time, the student is encouraged as early as possible to explore research interests not only with the Faculty Advisor but also with a range of faculty within, and possibly outside, Public Health.

The Faculty Advisor must be a member of the Public Health Graduate Group. The student's selection is approved by the Public Health Graduate Group Chair. The student and the Faculty Advisor will regularly interact and together develop research projects that will lead to a focus to be pursued in the student's Doctoral Dissertation. The Faculty Advisor, in the role of a mentor, plans strategies that will support the development of required competencies and provides ongoing informal feedback regarding the student's progress. In addition, the Faculty Advisor conducts a formal evaluation of the student's progress in the program at least annually (see Section 10). Therefore, each graduate student must always have a recognized Faculty Advisor who agrees to take on this important role. A match in terms of research interests with a Faculty Advisor is crucial for progress towards the degree. The Faculty Advisor will normally serve as Chair of the student's Faculty Advisory Committee, Candidacy Committee, and Dissertation Committee.

The Public Health program has adopted the use of an advisor/mentee "compact" (see Appendix B for the template) that encourages reflection on and discussion of responsibilities and objectives in the advising relationship for both Faculty Advisor and student, and outlines mutually-agreed-upon expectations. This document represents an agreement reached between the graduate student and the faculty mentor regarding the structure of the working relationship during the student's working relationship with the faculty member. It should be developed collaboratively between the two parties at the start of a new mentoring relationship and should be revised as needed (and is recommended to be reviewed at least once per year). **Graduate students are required to submit the completed compact to the Graduate Chair by the end of their first year in the program.**

Graduate Division also makes available a wide variety of resources related to the mentor/mentee relationship at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/academic-resources/mentormenteeship>. We encourage you to peruse these materials.

4b. Changing Faculty Advisor

The faculty recognizes that under certain circumstances there may be valid reasons for a graduate student to want to change their Faculty Advisor. Examples may include lack of funding, personality conflict, changes in research interests, and resignation of the Faculty Advisor from the faculty. If a student and their Faculty Advisor part ways for any reason, the student has one semester to identify a new Faculty Advisor; if after one semester they have failed to do so, the Graduate Chair will assume that role on a temporary basis and the student will be in Unsatisfactory standing.

If assistantships or fellowships are connected to a specific faculty member (for example, a student is funded as a research assistant on the Advisor's grant), a change of advisor may result in a change in or

loss of financial support. Likewise, changes in research direction that are likely to result from a change of Faculty Advisor may result in increased time required to complete the PhD degree. Therefore, a student contemplating a change in Faculty Advisor must discuss this with the Public Health Graduate Group Chair as well as Graduate Division's Academic Counselor (currently Maria Nishanian). To obtain and complete a change of advisor form, you must contact Maria Nishanian by email. See <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/academic-resources/academic-counseling> for more information.

4c. Faculty Advisory Committee

Mentoring and/or guidance of a student are provided by a Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC). This Committee is established jointly by the Faculty Advisor and student, before or during the fall semester of the 2nd year in the program. The student and members of this Committee should meet once per year, at a minimum, to provide the appropriate mentoring and/or guidance. This Committee is also charged with formally evaluating the student's progress in the Graduate Group at least annually, following the completion of each spring semester.

The FAC must include at least 3 faculty members: It is expected that at least one member of the FAC will be tenured, either at the level of Associate or Full Professor. At least 2 of the committee members must be Public Health Graduate Group core faculty. Members of the FAC may be replaced by agreement among the student and Faculty Advisor. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the committee member being replaced (see section 2.12.5). The FAC oversees the optional second-year paper, advancement to candidacy and dissertation research and writing.

More details on the role of the Faculty Advisory Committee at different stages are provided in the Public Health Policies and Procedures document.

If committee members change during the preparation for advancement to candidacy (Qualifying Exam) or dissertation stages, you must submit a "Request for Reconstitution of Committee Membership" form, available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>.

5. Sources of Funding

Graduate students who received a funding offer with their admissions offer will have their financial support according to the terms of the funding offer. Funding will come through a combination of Teaching Assistantships, Graduate Research Assistantships, and/or Fellowships. More information on financial support can be found in the [Graduate Policies and Procedures Handbook](#). Graduate students are also strongly encouraged to seek grant funding to support their research. Our faculty regularly teach a grant-writing seminar that supports students in crafting fellowship applications. The UC Merced Graduate Division website also maintains a list of some such opportunities. NIH and AHRQ R36 dissertation awards are encouraged for graduate students who are eligible (<https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/research-education/R36>). Students may also be nominated or apply for internal UC Merced fellowships (see <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/funding/internal>).

6. Coursework Requirements

The Public Health Graduate Group faculty has established a minimum requirement of 56 units of graduate (200 series) coursework for the PhD, which must be met during at least four semesters of full-time (defined as being enrolled in a minimum of 12 units) academic residence at UC Merced.

6a. Core Required Courses

Typically, 24 of the 56 required units will come from six required core courses, shown in the table below.

Course Number	Course Name	Unit
PH 201	Foundations in PH	4
PH 202	Epidemiology	4
PH 211 (Stats I) and PH 212 (Stats II)	PH Stats I and II	8
PH 203	Research Methods	4
PH 208a & 208b (counted as 1 course taught over 2 semesters)	Professional seminar	4

Students who have earned a Master of Public Health (MPH) or Master of Science in Public Health (MSPH) are automatically waived out of *PH 201: Foundations of Public Health*. These students also have the option of waiving out of other core courses if they have previously taken an equivalent course, and the following conditions are met:

- The content of the equivalent course has >80% overlap with the UC Merced course for which the waiver is requested. Course content overlap is assessed using the course syllabi provided with the request.
- The course has been taken within the last five years
- The course was completed with a B (or class GPA of 3.0) or higher

See more about course waivers in section 6c.

Students must receive a passing grade (a B or higher) in all core courses. Students receiving a failing grade in these courses must repeat the course and receive a passing grade. Students may, in collaboration with their Faculty Advisor, determine the pace of coursework that is appropriate. However, failure to complete required coursework with at least a B average on the typical timeline is potential grounds for a Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation. Moreover, the core requirements must be met in the first year of residence at UC Merced unless a required course is not offered during the first year. At least ten 4-unit courses (or 40 units), including all core required courses, must be completed before advancing to candidacy.

To ensure consistency in training, the following core courses cannot be waived:

- Epidemiology (PH 202)
- Research methods (PH 203)
- The Professionalization Seminar (PH 208a & 208b)

Students may petition the Graduate Group's Education and Curriculum Committee to substitute a different statistics class or classes. Such a class or classes must cover some part of linear models and must be approved by the instructor of record of the statistics class(es) to be substituted.

6b. Advanced Methods and Substantive Courses

The remaining 32 (of 56) units will come from a combination of Advanced Methods courses and substantive/elective courses.

- Advanced Methods: One advanced methods course (4 units; choose from PH213 Advanced Biostatistics, PH215 Qualitative Methods, or PH2XX Evaluation)
- Substantive/elective courses: Seven courses (28 units), five of which must be taken within Public Health. Relevant Public Health courses that fall under this category include but are not limited to: PH204 Environmental Health, PH205 Health Services Research and Policy, PH216 Health Policy, PH206 Health Communication, PH207 Health Behavior Theory, PH220 Environmental Epi, PH209A/B Grant Writing, PH218 Psychiatric Epidemiology, and PH290 (revolving topics). As the department grows, new course options will be introduced.
 - Additional Advanced Methods courses taken (beyond the one required) will count towards this requirement.
 - Two of the seven required substantive courses may be taken in departments outside Public Health. Credit will not be given for more than 2 courses taken outside of the Public Health department.
 - Directed reading courses (i.e., PH294 units) may count for up to 8 substantive course units if the following conditions are met:
 1. The coursework is facilitated by a Public Health faculty member (core or affiliate),
 2. A complete syllabus is prepared for the course, for submission to the Graduate Group's Education and Curriculum Committee for approval before the last day of the Add/Drop period of the semester in which the course will be taken, and
 3. There is no equivalent formally approved course anticipated to be offered at UC Merced within the student's first 3 years of study.
 4. To sign up for PH294 independent study credit, students should use the Independent Study form, available at: https://registrar.ucmerced.edu/sites/registrar.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/independent_study_ay.pdf. The "Graduate" option should be selected on the form, and PH294 can be indicated on the "other" line under "Specify one course number from the following." Instructor permission can be obtained by attaching an approval email to the submission, which should be emailed to registrar@ucmerced.edu, copying the PH Graduate Specialist and ssha.grad@ucmerced.edu.
 - PH295 and PH297 research units do not count towards the 56 required units. It is expected that students will conduct research separate from their coursework as part of their doctoral training.
 - The Graduate Division requires that graduate students be enrolled in at least 12 units of upper division or graduate-level units per semester. Registration in PH 295 (Graduate Research) or PH 297 (Dissertation Research) may be used to fill this requirement with permission from the faculty advisor.

Summary: 24 units of core coursework and 32 units of additional coursework (comprising advanced methods coursework and substantive courses) are required for a total of 56 units. Full-time students must enroll for 12 units per semester including academic and/or research units. Per UC regulations, ordinarily students shall not receive credits for more than 12 units of graduate level courses per semester.

6c. Course waivers

Obtaining a course waiver will NOT reduce the minimum number of course credits (i.e., 56) to be taken as part of the degree program. The general process for a student to request a course waiver is found within the Graduate Division Policies and Procedures (see section on “Standards and Requirements for Graduate Degree Programs”). Please notify the Graduate Chair immediately upon your matriculation into the program if you plan to request a course waiver(s). The request is reviewed by the Graduate Chair, academic advisor, instructor of record, and the Public Health Doctoral Education Policy Committee. Together, they make the final decision. If deemed necessary, the student may be asked to take a one-time proficiency exam prior to granting the waiver. In such cases, a final score of 80% or more is required to pass. If the identified parties do not agree, then the decision is turned over to the graduate group for a formal vote. No appeal is available for this waiver process.

7. Department Community Participation Expectations

Graduate students are also expected to participate in activities that facilitate the organizational functioning of the Graduate Group. The key activities are:

1. Attending departmental seminars and events
2. Attending graduate student meetings when called by the Graduate Chair
3. Participating in new graduate recruitment activities, including the Visitation Weekend

Examples of additional optional activities include serving on search committees, serving as a representative in graduate student governance organizations, and participating in additional outreach activities. Students doing such activities should report them in their annual evaluation. Finally, we encourage students to regularly discuss additional ways to be involved in the community with their Faculty Advisor. The above list is not meant to be exhaustive.

In addition, graduate students are expected to make efforts to involve themselves in the wider intellectual community by attending regional and national professional conferences, and where possible presenting their own original research at these venues.

8. Optional Second Year Research Paper

The Public Health Graduate Program is designed for students interested in pursuing a PhD in Public Health. However, PhD students have the option to obtain a *Master of Science in Public Health* (MSPH) degree, typically en route to a PhD degree, but also (rarely) in lieu of a PhD degree if a student exits the graduate program prior to fulfilling the PhD requirements. The advancement-to-candidacy course requirements satisfy the course requirements for the optional MSPH degree. Completing the second-year paper at the Pass level will serve as the Master's capstone project.

Each student must declare to their Faculty Advisory/Advisory Committee, at their first end-of-year progress meeting, whether they plan to complete the second-year paper and obtain the optional MSPH (Master's-Along-the-Way) degree. We typically recommend that students coming into the PhD without a master's degree strongly consider doing the second-year paper and MSPH degree; those coming in with a master's degree are often discouraged from doing the second-year paper. The following procedures apply *only* to students wishing to obtain the optional MSPH degree.

8a. The second-year research paper

The second-year research paper consists of an empirical research project¹ taken from the conceptualization stage, through design, data collection, analysis, and write-up. The student does not necessarily need not be the originator of the second-year paper research idea, but must be an active participant in all steps, and the write-up must be sole authored by the student; other authors may be added to a later published version of the paper, as appropriate, and the order of authorship on such a subsequent publication may change. The project should typically be completed by the end of the second year of study (end of the Spring semester); it must be completed and submitted for review by the Faculty Advisory Committee prior to commencement of the 3rd year of the program (i.e., by the end of the summer following the 2nd year of graduate study), and prior to advancing to candidacy. If a full draft is not submitted by this time, the student will be required to convene a Faculty Advisory Committee meeting at the end of the fall semester of their third year and will receive an Unsatisfactory Progress or Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation.

The second-year paper will be conducted in close collaboration with the Faculty Advisor; students should ensure that the Advisor concurs with decisions made at all stages of the project. The second-year paper will be evaluated by the members of the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC). Upon submission of the final paper, the FAC have at least 14 but no more than 28 days to evaluate the paper and make a recommendation as to whether the second-year paper requirement has been satisfied. The recommendation will be for the student to be awarded an MSPH and continue onto the pre-candidacy phase (Pass — meeting all evaluation rubric criteria at the “Intermediate” level or above), or to not be awarded an MSPH (Fail — failing to meet all evaluation rubric criteria at the “Intermediate” level or above). In the event that the second-year paper is awarded a Fail, the student will be given the opportunity to revise the paper. A written request for revisions will be provided to the student. Students will be expected to undertake the requested revisions and resubmit the paper to the FAC within 6 weeks. The FAC will then re-evaluate the paper, and provide a revised assessment. The FAC, by unanimous consensus, determines the result of the student examination. In the event that the student and the FAC do not agree on the acceptability of the second-year paper, the Chair of the Public Health Graduate Group

¹ Empirical projects include primary, secondary, or meta-analysis of data.

will make the final decision. If the student fails the second-year paper again after revising, they will receive an Unsatisfactory evaluation and may be subject to removal from the Ph.D. program.

8b. Steps for obtaining the optional Master's Along the Way Degree

Please consult early and often with Pakou about this process! Requirements to receive the MSPH:

- Complete at least four semesters of academic residency at UCM
- Complete the core courses: PH201, PH202, PH 203, PH 208a, PH 208b, PH 211 and PH212
- Complete 4 elective courses (16 units of coursework), which can but are not required to include an Advanced Methods course
- Have a cumulative GPA no lower than 3.0
- Receive a “pass” on the second-year paper

Students who choose the optional MSPH degree en route to their Ph.D. (non-terminal) need to complete the Graduate Division form [*Final Report for Master's Degree*](#) following the successful completion of the Spring semester of their 2nd year of study. All other MSPH requirements should have been met at this point. Note that many students completing the second-year paper do not receive final advisory committee approval until August of their second year, and may therefore need to file for the MSPH degree in the fall of their 3rd year. Please communicate with our Graduate Specialist (Pakou Thao, pthao29@ucmerced.edu) for detailed instructions on how to file the paperwork. **Please note, the entire process of filing may take four to six weeks. Degrees are granted at one of three times during the year (end of spring, summer, or fall) but filing deadlines are well beforehand. Please refer to Graduate Division's [Dates and Deadlines](#) page for more information. Also see important information regarding graduate application found here: <https://registrar.ucmerced.edu/policies/graduation>.*

Students who opt for a terminal MSPH degree in lieu of the PhD degree should inform their Faculty Advisor and the Graduate Group Chair of this decision prior to the start of their terminal semester. Students must complete the relevant portions of the Graduate Division form “Application for Advancement to Candidacy” at this time.

9. Teaching Requirements

The Public Health PhD program presents numerous opportunities for graduate students to gain teaching experience. To ensure that students acquire a range of relevant experiences, serving as an Academic Student Employee (ASE)/teaching assistant (TA) is a requirement for earning the PhD. A student meets the teaching requirement by serving as a TA for *no less than two semesters*. This does not need to be through a funded teaching assistantship but can be as a volunteer. Academic appointment criteria for graduate students are stated in the Graduate Division Policies & Procedures, and reflect minimum University standards and requirements (e.g., students in Unsatisfactory standing may not be appointed as TAs).

TA teaching-related responsibilities vary by the course assignment, but generally include assistance in such activities as classroom/laboratory teaching, leading discussion sections, holding office hours, preparing materials for instruction, proctoring examinations, and grading student papers and examinations. **Please consult with your assigned Instructor of Record each semester for further instructions.** UC Merced ASEs appointed as Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, Readers, and

Tutors are covered by a collective bargaining agreement between the Regents of the University of California and the Student Workers Union, International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) AFL-CIO. The entire agreement is available at: <https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/labor/bargaining-units/bx/index.html>.

10. Normative Time to Degree and Plan of Study

While time to completion of the degree will vary, a general expectation is that students will complete the majority of their course work (and complete the optional second-year research paper) by the end of their 2nd year, pass their Qualifying Exam by the middle of the 3rd year, pass their Dissertation Proposal and Defense by the middle of the 4th year, and defend their dissertation in their 5th year of study. (Note, again, that SSHA will not provide TA positions to students past their fifth year.)

Normative Plan of Study for a Public Health Graduate Student					
	Fall Semester	Units	Spring Semester	Units	Summer
Year One	PH 201: Foundations in Public Health PH 203: Research Methods in Public Health PH 211: Stats I PH 208a: Professionalization Seminar	4 4 4 2	PH 211 Statistics II PH 202: Epidemiology PH 2XX Elective or Topical Area Requirement PH 208b: Professionalization Seminar <i>-Submit completed Mentor/Mentee compact to Graduate Chair</i> <i>-First Year Annual Review</i>	4 4 4 2	Research for optional second- year paper
Year Two	PH 204: Environmental Health PH 209a: Grant writing seminar PH 2XX: Elective or Topical Area Requirement PH 2XX: Elective or Topical Area Requirement	4 2 4 4	PH 2XX: Elective or Advanced Methods Requirement PH 209b: Grant writing seminar PH 2XX: Elective or Topical Area Requirement PH 295: Research Units <i>-Turn in optional second year paper*</i> <i>-Second Year Annual Review</i>	4 2 4 2	Summer Research experience (with faculty, community, gov) Complete requested revisions to optional second-year paper
Year Three	PH 2XX: Elective or Advanced Research Methods PH 295: Research Units Prepare for the Qualifying Examination <i>-Qualifying Exam/Advance to Candidacy</i>	4 8	PH 295: Research Units Work on Dissertation Proposal <i>-Third Year Annual Review</i>	12	Work on Dissertation Proposal
Year Four	PH 297: Dissertation Research Dissertation Proposal Defense	12	PH 297: Dissertation Research <i>-Fourth Year Annual Review</i>	12	
Year Five	PH 297: Dissertation Research	12	PH 297: Dissertation Research Apply for jobs <i>Dissertation should be completed and defended</i> by the end of the spring semester.	12	

*Terminal MSPH students depart at the end of their 2nd year

11. Annual Review Process

Student progress will be evaluated on an annual basis. To this end, the student prepares a cumulative Progress Report prior to the end of the spring semester. The Progress Report must be reviewed by the student's Faculty Advisory Committee (FACC, which is chaired by the Faculty Advisor. At this meeting, feedback is provided to the student both orally and in writing. Annual Faculty Review continues until the student has completed an approved Doctoral Dissertation. A fall semester Progress Report and student/FAC meeting (taking place in December or early January) may be convened in any year by request of the student, Faculty Advisor, or other member of the FAC. A fall semester Progress Report and FAC meeting *must* be conducted if the student has previously received an Unsatisfactory or Potentially Unsatisfactory evaluation, has not submitted their 2nd year thesis by the required deadline, or has failed their 2nd year thesis, Qualifying Exam, or Dissertation Proposal.

As part of each student's annual review, a determination must be made whether the student's progress on the whole is Satisfactory, Potentially Unsatisfactory, or Unsatisfactory. This determination is then clearly communicated in written form and signed by the faculty member(s) who completed the review. The student also signs the evaluation indicating understanding of the evaluation and is given one copy. The original is placed in the student's file.

- *Satisfactory Progress*: Satisfactory progress is determined based on both the student's recent academic record and overall performance. Satisfactory Progress is more than simply avoiding displaying any of the specific behaviors listed below as indicative of Unsatisfactory Progress. It is a subjective judgment made by the Faculty Advisor and members of the FAC based on the quality, quantity, and timeliness of performance in research as well as the other activities described in the Graduate Student Handbook. The Faculty Advisor is expected to communicate their standards in these respects on a continual basis. These standards also provide the framework for the Annual Reviews.
- *Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress*: Potentially unsatisfactory progress is *in part* determined with reference to the Unsatisfactory Progress criteria. Students deemed at risk of meeting ≥ 1 of these criteria may be judged as making potentially unsatisfactory progress.
- *Unsatisfactory Progress*: Unsatisfactory academic progress is *in part* determined based on explicit requirements, including those outlined in the UC Merced Graduate Division's *Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook* (Sect. VI.A.2.1) and reproduced here:
 - An overall grade point average below 3.0; or
 - A grade point average below 3.0 in two successive semesters; or
 - Fewer than 8 units completed and applicable toward the advanced degree requirements in the last two semesters; or
 - Failure to complete required courses or examinations satisfactorily within the period specified by the Graduate Group; or
 - Failure to pass Candidacy or Dissertation Final Examination in two attempts; or
 - Failure to progress academically within the Normal Time to Degree framework specified for the student's Graduate Group; or
 - The appropriate faculty committee's evaluation that there has not been satisfactory progress toward completion of the thesis or dissertation.

Note, however, that the professional judgment of the faculty assigned the role to evaluate the student, upon review of all graduate work undertaken by that student, *is paramount*. Faculty may establish more

restrictive criteria than the above minimum criteria.

A judgment of Unsatisfactory Progress has significant negative consequences for a graduate student. A student in Unsatisfactory standing is ineligible for any academic appointment or employment, such as a Teaching Assistantship, and may not receive internal fellowship support or other awards. The Graduate Group Chair may request that the Dean of the Graduate Division make an exception, but there is no guarantee that it will be granted. The Graduate Division delegates the monitoring of student performance regarding these rules to the Graduate Group and the Registrar.

11a. Communication of Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress

Students should be given early warning of potentially unsatisfactory progress. The Annual Review specified above is a minimum. In addition, Faculty Advisors are encouraged to be direct in communicating orally, and in writing as necessary, with students demonstrating difficulties as soon as possible and on a continual basis. For example, course instructors are encouraged to engage in this communication, and to inform the Faculty Advisor when a student is experiencing difficulties during a course, and not wait until the end.

When notices of potential unsatisfactory progress are provided in writing to the student, the written communication should include specific details on areas that require improvement, provide an outline for future expectations of academic progress, and set meeting dates to maintain continuity in advisement. The purpose of the notice of potentially unsatisfactory progress is to provide the student with a reasonable period of time (usually at least one academic semester) in which to make the necessary improvement in their academic status, and successfully complete their graduate study.

In the case of a formal determination of Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress following an Annual Review, criteria must be specified in writing detailing what the student will need to achieve to be removed from this status and the timetable for doing so. This is included in the written feedback provided to the student as part of the formal review. Whenever a student has been deemed to make Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress, the student's whole FAC needs to review progress at the end of the subsequent semester and determine status at that time. The professional judgment of the FAC, upon review of all graduate work undertaken by that student, is paramount in determining whether the student can or cannot be removed from Potentially Unsatisfactory Progress status. **While it is expected that the Faculty Advisor will communicate with the student when in this status to provide guidance and feedback on efforts to meet the specified criteria, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to achieve progress that can be deemed Satisfactory Progress.**

11b. Disqualification based on Unsatisfactory Progress

The process for academically disqualifying a student based on a determination of Unsatisfactory Progress is described in the Graduate Division Policies & Procedures handbook, which can be found at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures>. The minimal criteria for determinations of Unsatisfactory Progress are presented above.

11c. Student Appeals Procedures

Per the Regulations of the Academic Senate Merced Division, a student who is subject to an impending academic disqualification has 30 calendar days (from the date of the Graduate Dean's Notification of Impending Academic Disqualification) to respond in writing to the recommendation for disqualification. Student appeals will be considered only if based upon appropriate cause, such as: (1) procedural error; (2) judgments based on non-academic criteria; (3) apparent personal bias; (4) specific mitigating circumstances affecting academic performance; or (5) discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or other protected status. More details on the appeals process are provided in the Graduate Division Policies & Procedures Handbook.

12. Qualifying Examinations and Advancement to Candidacy

Graduate students are considered resident graduates, not candidates for a degree, until admitted to candidacy by the Graduate Division after formal application and satisfactory completion of candidacy requirements. Candidacy requirements in the Public Health PhD program comprise:

- Demonstrating a high level of scholarship in full-time study (a minimum of 12 units per semester including research hours) at the PhD level, for at least 4 semesters,
- Completing at least ten 4-unit courses (or 40 units), including:
 - All core required courses (24 units) and
 - At least four elective courses (or 16 units),
- A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0, and
- Passing the Qualifying Exam, which demonstrates readiness to proceed to the dissertation phase.

Students must take the Comprehensive Qualifying Exam (QE), to be administered by the Graduate Group in December of each year, during their 3rd year of graduate study. Students who cannot take the exam in the December of their 3rd year due to illness, educational leave, etc., must petition the Graduate Group Chair for permission to postpone the exam. The student must submit this petition via email at least 6 weeks before the scheduled December exam. Only one petition is allowed, and the student may only request a postponement of one semester (i.e., they must take the exam the following May, when the make-up exam would be offered for any students who received a Fail grade on their December attempt).

Students should submit the Graduate Division's Application for Qualifying Examination form (available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>), with all Candidacy committee members' signatures, at least one month prior to the date of the Qualifying Exam. In the event that the student does not pass their qualifying examination in the December of their third year, they may retake them one time at the end of the following spring semester.

Qualifying Examinations are intended to determine whether the student possesses the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete a dissertation research project in their chosen areas of interest. The QE is required for all Ph.D. students in Public Health and will be administered in December of each year, on specific dates set by the Graduate Group. Students have the *option* of taking this two-part qualifying exam in their 2nd year in the program if they were admitted to the program with an MPH or equivalent Master's degree. Such students should choose their QE timing (year 2 vs. year 3) in

consultation with their Faculty Advisory Committee. This decision is subject to approval by the Graduate Group Chair. Students who were admitted to the program without a Master's degree are required to take it in their 3rd year. Students who do not pass one or both parts of the exam on their first attempt must re-take it the following May, on dates set by the Graduate Group.

The exam will consist of 2 parts, each of which will be given on a different day (e.g., a Tuesday and Thursday of 1 week). Students will be required to sign an honor statement asserting that their exam reflects solely their own work; students may not work together on the exam. Students will be allowed to consult the Internet during the exam if they wish to do any background reading. Each part of the exam will be designed to be answerable within 6 hours, but students will have 8 hours to complete each part. To avoid time conflicts with courses, the qualifying exam will be given in the week after fall semester classes end. If a student cannot or does not wish to take the exam at home, a private space on campus will be made available to them (with computer if necessary). The questions on the exam will require demonstration of mastery in core public health content areas:

- Knowledge of rigorous methodological approaches appropriate to designing and carrying out research in public health.
- Knowledge of appropriate measurement techniques, including quantitative and/or qualitative measures, for key constructs in public health.
- Competency in evaluating and interpreting basic epidemiologic and biostatistical analysis techniques.
- Ability to critically review research in public health with respect to the individual, community, and societal determinants of population health.

The exam questions will be aligned with Public Health PhD Program Learning Outcomes 1, 3, 4, and 7, as appropriate at this stage of student training:

1. Breadth – Demonstrate knowledge of the discipline of Public Health. Students will be able to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels.
3. Methods – Competency with multiple methodological approaches to conducting rigorous research on public health phenomena. Students will be able to design a study drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches and complete a study using a methodology appropriate to their research area.
4. Communication – Effective scientific communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner. Students will be able to communicate their knowledge of contemporary public health methods to diverse audiences.
7. Professionalism – Proficiency in the skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of the profession of Public Health. Students will become active members of the professional public health community, including attending and participating in conferences and other appropriate venues.

Format of the exam

Part 1. Produce a small-scale grant proposal (based on a prompt provided by the Graduate Group) that includes generating:

1. A specific research question designed to be answered by the proposed study.

2. A study design to answer the research question proposed by the student, wherein any research design is welcome if a strong rationale is provided. Options for the research design include but are not limited to:
 - a. Quantitative (e.g., cross-sectional, cohort, case-control, ecological, time-series, randomized trial, intervention/evaluation study etc.);
 - b. Qualitative (e.g., ethnographic study, case study, grounded theory, action research, etc.),
 - c. Mixed-methods (e.g., exploratory, explanatory, sequential, convergent, etc.).
3. Details about the methods of conducting the study, including information about the study sample, data sources or methods of data collection, and analysis plan;
4. Consideration of the potential limitations of the study design and methods, and how the proposed approach addresses potential threats to validity; and
5. Consideration of the human subjects/bioethical concerns relevant to the conduct of the study.

Students will not be required to address the background or rationale for conducting the proposed study, details on the research team, knowledge translation activities, budget, or timeline. The proposal should be 5-7 pages in length, 1.5-spaced, using 0.75" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font.

Part 2. Produce a review of a recent publication in a public health journal. Faculty will select 3 recent quantitative publications from different areas within public health, and students will be allowed to choose one of these three on which to conduct their review. The review should include:

1. Describing the research question(s) the authors are asking;
2. Very briefly summarizing the authors' arguments for why the study is important, including a discussion of their key hypotheses;
3. Critically analyzing the authors' research design and the strengths and limitations of their study data;
4. Synthesizing and interpreting the quantitative results presented in the article (synthesis and interpretation emphasized here – as opposed to, for example, simply identifying and repeating reported coefficients);
5. Considering the effects of any potential biases, confounding, and statistical power on the results; and
6. Discussing causality, particularly with respect to how the study may or may not inform causal interpretations of the association(s) of interest, and how the study results could or should be used for public health applications.

Part 2 is expected to be approximately 3-5 double-spaced pages in length, using 0.75" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font.

The comprehensive exam will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis by a rotating committee of 3 faculty members, whose membership is determined through random selection the previous May. Each member of the committee will read every exam (parts 1 and 2, separately) and provide a grade for each part. Grading will be double-blinded, through the assistance of the graduate assistant. Each part of the comprehensive exam will be scored as Pass or Fail by each faculty committee member. In the event of disagreement among any 2 committee members about an exam's grade, the entire committee will

discuss the exam and come to a consensus. If a student fails one or both parts of the exam, the committee will provide feedback about which aspects of the exam contributed to the failing grade.

When the Qualifying Exam is passed by unanimous consensus of the examination committee, the student is recommended for Advancement to Candidacy as reported to the Graduate Division on the Qualifying Examination Report (<https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>). This form must be signed by all FAC members. This form is also submitted if the student failed the examination. If the recommendation of the FAC is favorable, the student must file the appropriate paperwork (Advance to Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor Philosophy Form and Conflict of Interest Form) with the Graduate Division and pay the candidacy fee in order to be officially promoted to Ph.D. Candidacy.

Students who do not pass one or both parts of the exam on their first attempt must re-take it the following May, on dates set by the Graduate Group. If a student passes one part but fails the other part, they need only retake the part that they failed. The exam questions will differ between the December and May versions. Failure to pass one or both parts of the first Comprehensive Exam will trigger a mid-year (January) evaluation meeting with the student's entire Faculty Advisory Committee. Failing one part will result in a Potentially Unsatisfactory evaluation at this meeting. Failing both parts will result in an Unsatisfactory evaluation at this meeting. Failure to pass the QE on the second attempt will result in a second Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation and expulsion from the PhD program.

13. Dissertation

The Doctoral Dissertation is the culmination of the PhD program, in which the Doctoral Candidate demonstrates the capability to conduct research independently that makes an original contribution to knowledge of a quality that can be published in a reputable scientific journal. The planning and completion of the Dissertation is supervised by the Doctoral Committee Chair, who usually is the Candidate's Faculty Advisor. The student's FAC (Doctoral stage) approves the Dissertation proposal and evaluates whether the Dissertation has been completed in accordance with high scientific standards. In overview, the dissertation process starts with the establishment of the Doctoral-stage FAC, which is done when recording Advancement to Candidacy. The Doctoral Candidate submits a dissertation proposal to the Doctoral-stage FAC and defends the proposal at an oral Proposal Defense meeting. This should usually be done within six months of Advancing to Candidacy. If the proposal is passed by the FAC, the student undertakes and completes the proposed research. Having completed the research, the student must submit a final written Dissertation to the FAC, and defend the Dissertation at an oral defense meeting. This Dissertation Defense constitutes the Final Examination for the PhD; at the conclusion of the Defense, the Committee votes on whether to approve the Dissertation. These stages are presented in more detail below.

13a. Dissertation Proposal

The Dissertation Proposal serves three primary functions. First, it reviews the relevant literature and in so doing defines the area of inquiry of the proposed Dissertation. Second, it provides a clear statement of actionable research aims, questions, and/or hypotheses that will be addressed in the Dissertation. Third, it outlines the methodological and analytic approach that will enable the proposed research to address these aims, questions, and/or hypotheses. The Dissertation Proposal should be approximately 30 double-spaced pages, not including references and appendices. The Candidate works with the Faculty Advisor

until the latter deems the Dissertation Proposal of enough quality to pass to the Doctoral-stage FAC. Committee members should make every effort to provide such feedback in a timely fashion but should inform the student promptly if they will be unable to provide such informal feedback. When the finalized Dissertation Proposal is submitted, the FAC should have at least 7 but no more than 14 days in which to review it prior to the Proposal Defense Meeting.

Proposal Defense Meeting: The Candidate must consult with the FAC to schedule the Proposal Defense Meeting, at which all members of the committee must be present in person (or via conference call under extenuating circumstances such as a Committee member being on sabbatical or off-site). The Candidate should schedule a minimum 2-hour block of time for the meeting. At the Proposal Defense Meeting, the Candidate will present an overview of the proposed research. The Committee will then discuss the proposed research with the Candidate. At the conclusion of the Proposal Defense Meeting, the Candidate will be asked to leave, and the FAC will deliberate on whether to pass the proposal. The Committee recommendation is by unanimous consensus, leading to one of the following recommendations:

Pass: The proposal is passed, and the Candidate may commence with the proposed research.

Minor Revisions: The proposal is passed pending minor revisions, which upon completion must be approved by the Faculty Advisor and any Committee member wishing to review such changes.

Major Revisions: The proposal is not passed because major substantive or methodological issues need to be addressed. The Candidate must revise the proposal considering committee feedback and resubmit the proposal within three months. At that time, the Candidate must reschedule the Proposal Defense Meeting and complete it satisfactorily before undertaking any dissertation research. Failure to complete it satisfactorily at a second defense must be addressed in the student's next Review, which must then involve the student's entire FAC and will potentially result in an Unsatisfactory Progress evaluation.

13b. Dissertation

Following successful defense of the Dissertation Proposal, the Doctoral Candidate undertakes and completes the proposed research under the supervision of the Doctoral-stage FAC. Although there are no set criteria for dissertation length or content, students are expected to produce a body of work that contains a thorough review of the literature, theoretical innovations, novel data collection and/or analysis, and at least three substantive chapters. One of two formats is typically used. Dissertations should be convertible to one book or three related, but separable, articles. The format of the Dissertation manuscript should be approved by all members of the FAC, subject to any requirements by the Public Health Graduate Group, the Graduate Division, and the University Archives. Candidates prepare the manuscript under the supervision of the Faculty Advisor who requests revisions until s/he judges that the work is ready to be reviewed by the remaining Committee members. For additional details regarding expectations, see the UC Merced Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines, **available at**

<https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/dissertationthesis-submission>.

Once the dissertation document is complete in the opinion of the student and his or her Faculty Advisor, the Candidate circulates the Dissertation among FAC members, allowing for a reasonable time frame for the Committee members to read and review. The FAC should provide comments, possibly leading to another revision before the final submission and the scheduling of the Dissertation Defense. FAC members should provide these comments in a timely fashion. The complete Dissertation must be provided to the FAC members at least 14 days prior to the scheduled defense.

13c. Final Examination (Defense)

Once all members of the FAC have read the dissertation and agreed that it is ready to be defended, the student is expected to negotiate with the members of the FAC and schedule a date and time for the defense. Announcement of the oral defense time and location will be made in appropriate forums such as an email list serve or a Public Health bulletin board. All members of the FAC must attend the thesis defense in person (or via conference call or videoconference under extenuating circumstances, such as a FAC member being at a distant site).

The defense of the Dissertation is a capstone event in the student's graduate career. It consists of an oral presentation of the Dissertation research by the candidate, followed by questions. This portion of the defense is open to the public. The Candidate is tasked with responding to the questions clearly and coherently. At the conclusion of the public portion of the defense, the Candidate and FAC will dismiss the public in order to discuss the dissertation in private. At the conclusion of the committee questions, the Candidate is excused, and the FAC deliberates on the quality of the written dissertation and the student's performance during the defense. The committee makes one of the following recommendations by unanimous consensus:

1. **Pass:** The dissertation and defense are of enough quality to warrant the awarding of a PhD degree from the University of California. The committee recommendation for passage must be unanimous.
2. **Minor Revisions:** The Dissertation is passed pending minor revisions, which upon completion must be approved by the Faculty Advisor and any FAC member wishing to review such changes. Upon approval the Candidate is awarded the PhD.
3. **Major Revisions:** The Dissertation is not passed because major substantive or methodological issues need to be addressed. The Candidate must revise the Dissertation considering FAC feedback and resubmit the Dissertation within 6 weeks. At that time, the Candidate must reschedule the Defense Meeting and complete it satisfactorily to receive a recommendation of Pass.

If the Doctoral-stage FAC recommends awarding the PhD degree, Committee members must sign the Final Report for the PhD Degree (available at <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/faculty-staff-resources/forms-publications>), the conferral of the PhD, subject to final submission of the approved Dissertation for deposit in the University Archives (see Graduate Policies & Procedures Handbook, Sect. VII.B.8).

14. Policies Regarding Transfer Students

Courses taken toward a graduate degree at another institution cannot be transferred for credit toward a Ph.D. at UC Merced. However, a course requirement may be waived if a similar course was taken at another institution. This course waiver process is outlined by the Graduate Division and can be found here: <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/policies-procedures> A student transferring into our program must, in their first semester at UC Merced, communicate to their Faculty Advisor and the Graduate Chair that they would like to request a course waiver(s) and submit their transcripts from their prior institution. The Advisor, Graduate Chair, and Public Health Graduate Education Policy Committee will meet to review the transcripts and determine which course(s) may be waived; they will

then inform the student of their decision and the student may submit the relevant form to Graduate Division. No student appeals are possible in this process.

15. Procedures for Requesting a Waiver of a Formal Requirement

All requirements outlined in this document must be met by graduate students before the Dissertation Committee will pass the Dissertation and recommend the awarding of the Doctoral Degree. However, under some circumstances, the student may believe that circumstances have made a requirement included in this document unnecessarily burdensome. Under such circumstances, the student may request that requirement be waived or modified. Doing so requires drafting a request letter, which must provide specific reasons why the waiver or modification should be granted. The request should be discussed with and must then be approved by the Faculty Advisor. If approved by the Advisor, the request must be approved following the procedures described in the previous section. In the event that the change involves a candidacy or Dissertation requirement, approval must also be granted by the relevant Candidacy or Dissertation committee. There is no guarantee that requests will be granted. If the Faculty Advisor does not approve a request for a waiver of a formal requirement, the student may appeal the request to the Education Policy committee (via petition to the Graduate Chair). However, students would be well-advised to consult with other faculty prior to filing such an appeal to determine if an appeal has grounds and a likelihood of success.

16. Leaving the Program Prior to Completion of the PhD Requirements

Students cannot be admitted into the program with the intent of solely completing the MSPH/terminal masters' degree. However, some PhD students may choose to leave the program. Students who do not receive Unsatisfactory Progress evaluations but who wish to leave the program for other reasons may do so via the normal Withdrawal process (see <https://registrar.ucmerced.edu/policies/leaving-uc-merced>). Students who receive two Unsatisfactory Progress evaluations may be recommended to leave the program by their FAC.

Students who elect or are judged not to meet the criteria for continuing the PhD degree will be notified in writing by the Graduate Group Chair of Public Health. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education. In some cases a doctoral student may choose to leave the program with a master's degree only. It is the responsibility of the Public Health Graduate Group to notify the Graduate Division via the Change of Degree form so that the student's record may be updated to reflect the student's degree status. This notice must include the student's written permission to have his/her degree objective changed officially from doctorate to master's.

17. PELP, In Absentia and Filing Fee status

Information about PELP (Planned Educational Leave Program), In Absentia (reduced fees when researching out of state), and Filing Fee status can be found in the Graduate Group Policies and Procedures Handbook, available on the Graduate Division Website.

20. Appendix A: Rubrics

Second Year Research Thesis Rubric

The Second Year Research Thesis rubric is used to assess student learning as demonstrated in the Second Year Research Thesis document. The Second Year Research Thesis serves as the MSPH Examination for students pursuing the optional MSPH degree. Students receive a single score for the document for each criterion (PLO). Students also receive an overall score for the benchmark. During the closed session of Committee deliberation, the Committee agrees on one score for all seven criteria and the overall outcome.

Committee members should remember that at the Master's level students are expected to possess a broad field of learning that extends well beyond that attained at the undergrad level, but is not necessarily expected to have made a significant original contribution to knowledge in Public Health or to be able to use sophisticated methodological tools to conduct independent research.

Committee members should consider:

1. Are each of the sub-criteria present for the criteria (check off those which are present)?
2. What comments does the student need in order to fully interpret each of the criterion scores?
3. What overall score does the student receive for the overall benchmark (pass, minor revision, or major revision)?

An electronic copy of the completed rubric is submitted by the advisor to the Public Health Graduate Studies Committee for assessment data collection.

Second Year Research Thesis Rubric for PhD and MSPH Students

Serves towards the optional MSPH Exam

Criteria*	Score	Comments
<p>1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research questions synthesize, critique, apply, and/or extend major Public Health issues/domains/theories. The research question(s) to be addressed is properly situated in the relevant literature Arguments and hypotheses flow from and/or are consistent with existing state of science/theories Importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the existing state of science/theories 	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate* 3. Advanced 4. Mastery</p>	
<p>2. Demonstrate topical area expertise in specific scientific domain within Public Health.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topical area literature is synthesized appropriately Arguments and hypotheses contribute to/extend the existing literature Importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the specific topical area 	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate* 3. Advanced 4. Mastery</p>	
<p>3. Critique and evaluate qualitative and quantitative Public Health research methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research design is appropriate for the research question(s) Appropriate data are identified and employed Reasonable justifications are provided for methodological decisions 	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate* 3. Advanced 4. Mastery</p>	
<p>4. Address team science/transdisciplinary aspects of the field or problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where appropriate, paper highlights team science/transdisciplinary approaches in the relevant literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductory Intermediate* Advanced Mastery 	
<p>5. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, about Public Health concepts, arguments, and methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper is clearly and precisely written so that it is fully understandable to Public Health faculty Where appropriate, the paper makes good use of tables and figures to accurately summarize and convey information 	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate* 3. Advanced 4. Mastery</p>	
<p>6. Demonstrate proficiency in the professional skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of Public Health careers.</p> <p>Written work displays the qualities needed to participate in Public Health careers such as the methods and information are cohesively presented in a way that demonstrates disciplinary norms for writing and citations are employed.</p>	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate* 3. Advanced 4. Mastery</p>	

Result:

Pass _____ **Minor Revision** _____ **Major Revision** _____

All 6 criteria should be scored on the following scale: 1=introductory, 2=intermediate, 3=advanced, and 4=mastery. All 6 criteria should be reached at the Advanced level. A score of introductory on any criteria results in a revision.

Public Health Qualifying Examination Rubric

[Under development.]

Dissertation Rubric

The Dissertation Proposal rubric will be completed by the Dissertation Committee during the proposal defense and shared with the Public Health Graduate Studies Committee in order to assist with evaluating the progress of individual students through our program.

Students receive a single score for both the document and oral portions for each criterion (PLO). Students also receive an overall score for the benchmark. During the closed session of Committee deliberation, the Committee agrees on one score for all seven criteria and the overall outcome.

Committee members should consider:

- Are each of the sub-criteria present for the criteria (check off those which are present)?
- What comments does the student need in order to fully interpret each of the criterion scores?
- What overall score does the student receive for the overall benchmark (pass or fail)?

An electronic copy of the completed rubric is submitted by the Faculty Advisor to the Public Health Graduate Studies Committee.

Dissertation Proposal and Oral Defense Rubric		
Criteria*	Score	Comments
1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research questions synthesize, critique, apply, and/or extend major Public Health issues/domains/theories. The research question(s) to be addressed is properly situated in the relevant literature Arguments and hypotheses flow from and/or are consistent with existing state of science/theories Originality and importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the existing state of science/theories 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery	Document:
		Oral:
2. Demonstrate topical area expertise in specific scientific domain within Public Health. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topical area literature is synthesized appropriately Arguments and hypotheses contribute to/extend the existing literature Originality and importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the specific topical area 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery	Document:
		Oral:
3. Critique and evaluate qualitative and quantitative Public Health research methods. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research design is appropriate for the research question(s) Appropriate data are identified Reasonable justifications are provided for methodological plans 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery	Document:
		Oral:
4. Address team science/transdisciplinary aspects of the field or problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal makes a convincing case for the research question(s) to be addressed using the expertise/perspective of more than one substantive area. Proposal draws upon previous literature to build a convincing argument for the present study. Proposal demonstrates the importance of the project in the context of the existing empirical and/or theoretical literature 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery	Document:
		Oral:
5. Design and conduct independent research that makes an original contribution to Public Health knowledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal makes a convincing case for the originality and importance of the research question(s) to be addressed through synthesis and critique of current literature Proposal presents clear research question/hypotheses The research design allows for a proper test of hypotheses (if deductive research is employed) 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery	Document:
		Oral:

<p>6. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, about Public Health concepts, theories, and methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal is clearly and precisely written so that it is fully understandable to Public Health researchers • Student presents a brief summary of the proposal that effectively communicates its contents. • Student clearly answers questions and convincingly defends proposal orally 	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery</p>	<p>Document:</p> <hr/> <p>Oral:</p>
<p>7. Demonstrate proficiency in the professional skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of Public Health careers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written work displays the qualities needed to participate in Public Health careers such as the methods and information are cohesively presented in a way that demonstrates disciplinary norms for writing and citations are employed. • Oral work displays the qualities needed to participate in Public Health careers such as the ability to freely but critically exchange ideas in a scholarly setting. Disciplinary norms for professional presentation style are adhered to. 	<p>1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced* 4. Mastery</p>	<p>Document:</p> <hr/> <p>Oral:</p>
<p>Result:</p> <p>Pass_____ Minor Revision_____ Major Revision_____</p> <p>All 7 criteria should be scored on the following scale: 1=introductory, 2=intermediate, 3=advanced, and 4=mastery. All 7 criteria should be reached at the Advanced level. A score of introductory on any criteria results in a revision.</p>		

Dissertation Manuscript Rubric

The Dissertation manuscript rubric is used to assess student learning as demonstrated in the Dissertation document and oral presentation of the document. Students receive a single score for both the document and oral portions for each criterion (PLO). Students also receive an overall score for the benchmark. During the closed session of Committee deliberation, the Committee agrees on one score for all six criteria and the overall outcome.

Committee members should consider:

- 1) Are each of the sub-criteria present for the criteria (check off those which are present)?
- 2) What comments does the student need in order to fully interpret each of the criterion scores?
- 3) What overall score does the student receive for the overall benchmark (pass or fail)?

An electronic copy of the completed rubric is submitted by the Faculty Advisor to the Public Health Graduate Studies Committee for assessment data collection.

Dissertation Manuscript and Oral Defense Rubric		
Criteria*	Score	Co
1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Public Health, including phenomena at the biological, psychological, and social levels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research questions synthesize, critique, apply, and/or extend major Public Health issues/domains/theories. The research question(s) to be addressed is properly situated in the relevant literature Arguments and hypotheses flow from and/or are consistent with existing state of science/theories Originality and importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the existing state of science/theories 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:
		Oral:
2. Demonstrate topical area expertise in specific scientific domain within Public Health. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topical area literature is synthesized appropriately Arguments and hypotheses contribute to/extend the existing literature Originality and importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the specific topical area 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:
		Oral:
3. Critique and evaluate qualitative and quantitative Public Health research methods. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research design is appropriate for the research question(s) Appropriate data are identified and employed Reasonable justifications are provided for methodological decisions 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:
		Oral
4. Address team science/transdisciplinary aspects of the field or problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research question(s) to be addressed is properly situated in the relevant empirical literature in at least two substantive areas 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous literature is synthesized to build a convincing argument for the present study. • Importance of the project is demonstrated in the context of the existing empirical and/or theoretical literature 		Oral:
<p>5. Design and conduct independent research that makes an original contribution to Public Health knowledge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissertation makes a convincing case for the originality and importance of the research question(s) to be addressed through synthesis and critique of current literature • Dissertation presents theoretically---motivated research question/hypotheses • The research design allows for a proper test of hypotheses (if deductive research is employed) • Dissertation is of a quality that could be publishable in a peer---reviewed journal or a reputable press with respect to the writing, argument, evidence, and scholarly contribution. 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:
		Oral:
<p>6. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, about Public Health theories, arguments, methods, and concepts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissertation is clearly and precisely written so that it is fully understandable to Public Health researchers • Where appropriate, the dissertation makes good use of tables and figures to accurately summarize and convey information • Student presents a brief summary of the dissertation that effectively communicates its contents. • Student clearly answers questions and convincingly defends dissertation orally 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:
		Oral:
<p>7. Demonstrate proficiency in the professional skills needed to participate in the intellectual and organizational aspects of Public Health careers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written work displays the qualities needed to participate in Public Health careers such as the methods and information are cohesively presented in a way that demonstrates disciplinary norms for writing and citations are employed. • Oral work displays the qualities needed to participate in Public Health careers such as the ability to freely but critically exchange ideas in a scholarly setting. Disciplinary norms for professional presentation style are adhered to. 	1. Introductory 2. Intermediate 3. Advanced 4. Mastery*	Document:
<p>Result:</p> <p>Pass_____ Minor Revision _____ Major Revision_____</p> <p>All 7 criteria should be scored on the following scale: 1=introductory, 2=intermediate, 3=advanced, and 4=mastery. All 7 criteria should be reached at the Mastery level. A score of introductory on any criteria results in a revision.</p>		

21. Appendix B: Faculty mentor/student mentee compact

Public Health Compact between Ph.D. Student and Faculty Mentor: Expectations and Objectives

Doctoral training entails both formal education in a specific discipline and research experience in which the graduate student trains under the supervision of one or more faculty members who will mentor the student throughout graduate school. **A positive mentoring relationship between the graduate student and faculty advisor is a vital component of the student's preparation for a future career.** A relationship of mutual trust and respect between mentor and graduate student is essential for healthy interactions and to encourage personal and professional growth.

Graduate students who pursue a public health graduate degree are embarking on a path of lifelong learning and are expected to take responsibility for their scientific and professional learning and development from the onset. This means:

- seeking guidance on and knowledge about course requirements,
- understanding program requirements, policies, and procedures,
- maintaining a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, collegiality, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards,
- maintaining complete, detailed, organized, and accurate research records,
- collaborating with their advisor and committee,
- establishing a feasible timeline for each phase of their work,
- managing the paperwork and deadlines related to program milestones,
- discussing policies on work hours, approved leave, and vacation with their graduate program and research advisor, and
- committing to working on an individual development plan.

Faculty members who advise students—with the backing of the graduate program and institution—are expected to fulfill the role of mentor, which includes:

- providing specialized academic and scientific training and guidance,
- fostering the graduate student's professional confidence,
- encouraging intellectual development, critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity,
- discussing authorship policies regarding papers,
- providing regular feedback in the form of both positive support and constructive criticism,
- working with the student to help plan and guide their research project(s), setting reasonable and attainable goals, and establishing a timeline for completion of the project,
- encouraging the graduate student to attend and present their research at professional meetings and making an effort to help them identify and secure funding for such activities,
- supporting the graduate student to publish their work in academic journals,
- providing financial support, as appropriate/possible and according to institutional guidelines and policies,
- promoting the training of the graduate student in professional skills needed for a successful career,
- providing or identifying opportunities in which the student can discuss and explore career opportunities and paths that match their skills, values, and interests and be supportive of their career path choices, and
- serving as a scientific and professional role model for the graduate student.

For the grad student: Questions to consider for the first meeting with a new faculty advisor

1. How much time should I be spending in the research group/working with the advisor/in the lab each week?
2. How does the research group communicate and interact? (group meetings, weekly or monthly one-on-one meetings with the advisor, etc.). Does the advisor prefer to communicate via email, phone, or in-person meetings?
3. Are there opportunities for a Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) position in the near future? How about summer funding?
4. What are your expectations about the types of data that I will have access to and work with? Use of quantitative vs. qualitative methods?
5. What are your expectations around your students publishing? What is your past experience publishing with your students? How does your mentoring approach help to develop students' writing skills?
6. What are your expectations for me about presenting at conferences or other professional meetings?
7. Do you ever provide funding for your students to attend and present at conferences?
8. What are your expectations for me with respect to applying for funding?
9. I have specific career goals (e.g., academic or non-academic positions) and wanted to share those goals with you [the advisor], and ask about specific activities (e.g., serving as a teaching assistant) that could support me in that activity in the future.

For the faculty mentor -- consider the following list of questions and think about discussing these during your initial meeting with your new student.

1. What mode and frequency of communication is expected from your trainees? E.g., do you expect that they meet with you once every 1-2 weeks (*strongly recommended; the department norm*), or less frequently than that? Will you meet as a lab group or individually? Do you have expectations about how frequently they respond to your emails?
2. What are your goals/objectives for your trainee by the end of their:
 - a. 1st year? 3rd year? Completion of his/her degree?
3. How many hours per week and at what times/days do you expect your trainee to work on your research? How do you think about the balance between coursework, GSR/TA work, and research? Are there differences during the academic year vs. over the summer?
4. What, if any, specific technical or communication skills do you expect your trainee to learn as part of the research experience?
5. What level of independence do you expect your trainee to achieve, once basic techniques are learned? What can your trainee do to gain independence in research? How long do you expect this transition to take?
6. What is your mentoring approach? Once your trainee has learned the techniques and procedures used in your lab, do you prefer to watch your trainee closely, walking them through all the steps, or do you prefer a more hands-off approach?
7. How will your trainee document research results? Is there a specific protocol for keeping a laboratory notebook (or similar) in your research group?
8. To whom should your trainee go if they have questions about your research project? Do you expect them to come to you solely (or first), or should they feel free to ask others in the research group? If others, who would be good resource people for your project?
9. What are your expectations for your trainee's level of comfort with the methodologies used in the lab?
10. What role will you play in the development of your trainee's writing skills? Will you provide feedback and guidance on numerous drafts or do you only want to provide feedback on the final draft? If you are only willing to read final drafts of writing, are there others in the lab who are willing to provide feedback on earlier drafts?
11. If a student has previous research experience, is there anything that you need to share about your research group that is unique and that the student should be aware of?

This document represents an agreement reached between the graduate student and the faculty mentor/advisor regarding the structure of the working relationship during the student's working relationship with the professor. It should be developed collaboratively between the two parties at the start of a new mentoring relationship and should be revised as needed (and is recommended to be reviewed at least once per year).

1. **Regular one-on-one meetings.** We plan to meet *(department norm that is strongly recommended: scheduled weekly or biweekly in-person meetings. Specify who should develop the agenda and how long the meetings will be)*:

2. **Outside of one-on-one meetings, our communications will primarily be through *(email/Slack/etc.)* and the expected timeframe for a response is:**

3. **Participation in group meetings (if relevant).** Student will participate in the following ongoing research or other group meetings:

4. **Tentative topics for papers over the next year on which student will be an author:** *(list topics and likely order of student's authorship, e.g., first, second, etc.)*

A) Student's role on project: *(describe their primary area(s) of responsibility)*

B) Expectations for feedback: *(describe around how much time is needed by the mentor to provide feedback on written work)*

5. **Professional meeting(s)** that the student will aim to attend over the next year, if any, and relevant dates:

6. **Funding.** What funding model will be in place for the next year? What are plans for future funding (internal/external fellowships, GSR, TA positions, etc.)? What are contingency plans, given any funding uncertainties? Academic year vs. summer?

7. Academic Milestones

Academic Milestones	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	F	Sp	Su	F	Sp	Su	F	Sp	Su	F	Sp	Su	F	Sp	Su
Program Milestones:															
Second-Year Paper (optional)															
Qualifying Exam															
Dissertation Proposal															
Dissertation Defense															
Other Milestones:															

Place an X in terms designated for milestones. F=Fall, Sp = Spring, Su = Summer.

8. **Other areas:** (list here any other areas of understanding between the student and mentor regarding working relationship or any other information about professional development plans. This might include what days the student will be where; any long absences agreed to in advance, unusual arrangements regarding use of computer equipment, space, or other resources; etc.)

Student Date

Mentor Date